



GODS & MONSTERS

With the director of *The Incredible Hulk* and the star of *Avatar*, *Clash Of The Titans* promises to be a truly epic, unashamed creature feature. This time, Perseus is going to take down Mount Olympus itself...

HAIR IS IMPORTANT. JUST ASK SAM WORTHINGTON. ALTHOUGH, BE CAREFUL IF YOU DO... "MY HAIR HAS GOT SO MUCH ATTENTION, I'M NOW THE JENNIFER ANISTON of fuckin' Greek mythology!" he growls. *Empire* has just congratulated the new-look Perseus on devising a way to avoid the hours his male *Clash Of The Titans* co-stars daily spend having their long, plaited wigs or hair extensions tidied and cleaned. "The other day my mate said to me, 'They didn't have that style of buzz-cut — they didn't have clippers in Greek days,' and I'm going, 'They didn't have winged horses! It's a fuckin' movie!'"

Worthington's colourful ire, it should be made clear, isn't entirely genuine, although given that the robustly physiqued actor sports a rather nasty (prosthetic) bite scar on one arm and is swathed in battered armour, the mock-rage is just that bit more convincing. He is, however, very passionate about the role, and once the subject of mythological follicle-styling is raised, it's something he sinks his teeth into with gusto. "Originally I wanted there to be a scene where Perseus did have long hair and then he cuts it with a knife, *à la* Rambo, as he's going to war. But we tried it and I had these little clumps and it wasn't quite heroic enough." He laughs. "I looked like Björk!"

Joking aside, giving his Gorgon-slaying demi-god hero of Ancient Greek myth a close shave served to make an important point of differentiation. Or two.

"Firstly, it separates him from everybody else [*in the cast*], 'cause he's been doing his own shit — he hasn't been looking through Argos fuckin' *Vogue* to see what the latest ringlets and trinkets are. Secondly, if I had my tresses and



Left: Perseus (Sam Worthington) gives Medusa the sack. Her head, at least. Here: With wooden warrior sidekick Suleiman (Ian Whyte), described as the movie's Chewbacca.

BRIEFING CLASH OF THE TITANS

Released: April 1

Budget: \$70 million (estimated)

Director: Louis Leterrier

Starring: Sam Worthington, Liam Neeson, Ralph Fiennes, Gemma Arterton, Mads Mikkelsen, Jason Flemyng, Alexa Davalos

Based on: The 1981 Desmond Davis movie of the same title, and best loved for being a Ray Harryhausen stop-motion showcase — itself based on the Greek myth of Perseus and the Gorgon.

This time... Demi-god Perseus is meaner, moodier and harder, determined to take on the gods themselves in battle after his adopted family is slaughtered by Hades's (Fiennes) harpies.

mane, everyone would go, 'Why are you playing it exactly like Harry Hamlin [from the 1981 original]?' To me, simply, it straightaway separates this movie from the original in one fell swoop. This guy has got a fuckin' buzz-cut. We're not in fuckin' Harryhausen mode anymore..."

DURING EMPIRE'S TRILOGY OF CLASH SET VISITS — TWO TO THE PRODUCTION'S BASE AT LONGCROSS STUDIOS, A FORMER RACETRACK complex that straddles the M3 in Surrey, and one on location on the dark, jagged slopes of the Dinorwic slate quarry in Snowdonia, Wales — it has been blindingly obvious that we're not in "fuckin' Harryhausen mode" anymore. We've seen the in-progress animatronic Styx-boatman Charon come to creepy life under the guidance of the special-effects team; we've stood atop the lighthouse where princess Andromeda will be dangled, Fay Wray-like, before a towering, CG sea-monster; we've watched Perseus locked in deadly battle with his lightning-riven nemesis, Calibos; we've walked the crowded, saffron-scented streets of the city of Argos; and we've watched breathtaking footage of Perseus at the summit of the volcano Mount Teide, which rises majestically above the clouds in Tenerife — a worthy stand-in for Olympus, realm of the gods.

The original *Clash* was an invaluable childhood movie for many of us — including Leterrier himself — but Desmond Davis's 28-year-old "Epic Entertainment Spectacular!" is one of those films best left to nostalgia, to fuzzy memories of giant, beaky beasts, Larry

"I WARNED THE ACTORS, 'THIS IS A BIG MOVIE — WIND, RAIN, MUD, SMOKE, ALL THAT STUFF!'" **LOUIS LETERRIER**

Olivier's frowning Zeus and Andromeda's naked *derrière*. Even though stop-motion maestro Ray Harryhausen's creature-work retains its charm, the rest — from Harry Hamlin's vacuum-packed-sawdust performance, to clockwork owl Bubo chirping like a poor man's R2-D2, to several horribly shot day-as-night sequences — creaks like a garden-shed door. It's hard to believe it was released the same year as *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and came a full year after *The Empire Strikes Back*. Unsurprisingly, feelings towards the original among the remake's cast and crew are, frankly, mixed.

"I think I saw it before *Star Wars*, actually," says Leterrier. "For me, it was the most magical movie I'd ever seen."

"Your memory is probably the best editor of the film," notes producer Kevin De La Noy, tactfully.

"I really loved it as a kid," enthuses Gemma Arterton, who plays Io, "the guardian angel of Perseus", a new addition to the story.

"You know what's really bogus about it?" asks Jason Flemyng, who dons a ton of prosthetics to play twisted monster-man Acrisius. "That stupid mechanical owl!"

"For its day, the original is great, but it dated very quickly," adds special-effects and

animatronics supervisor Neil Corbould, whose first job in film, funnily enough, was stamping the feathers on that very same owl.

"I haven't seen it," shrugs Mads Mikkelsen, sitting in full armour atop a wind-buffed Welsh escarpment, as grizzled warrior Draco. "I'm not really interested. I mean, we're doing a different film."

And Perseus himself? "It's not in my Top 10. Everyone seems to be asking me about it like it's some heralded great classic! I reacquainted myself with it before I did this. Struggled through it, to be honest."

It is, then, the perfect movie to remake: loved in retrospect for the concept, but revealed through rediscovery as flawed in its execution.

WHILE THIS NEW VERSION HAS BEEN THROUGH A FEW SCRIPT ITERATIONS (ONE DRAFT PENNED by Lawrence Kasdan), all the story keystones are in place: Perseus, son of Zeus, must decapitate hideous snake-woman Medusa in order to petrify the monstrous aquatic Titan that is the Kraken, and thereby rescue sacrificial princess Andromeda (now played by Alexa Davalos). But inevitably,

as the project's passed through two directors (the first, Stephen Norrington, walked after proving unable, in his words, "to excite Warner Bros. with my take, or influence the screenplay to any comfortable extent"), several tweaks, omissions and additions have occurred.

Take the giant scorpions, for example. In the original, Calibos (Neil McCarthy), then a wily satyr, stabs the bag containing Medusa's head so the dripping blood mutates a few weeny arachnids into 10-foot-long nightmares that attack Perseus and his journeymen. In the Leterrier version, we meet the scorpions, here renamed "Scorpioks", much earlier. And they're much, much bigger...

The day *Empire* is invited to the Dinorwic location in late July, Leterrier is shooting the heroes' arrival at the Stygian Mountain, where Perseus must interrogate three blind witch-things as to how he should tackle the Kraken. Worthington's son of Zeus heads up the rough-hewn steps, while three smoke machines spew out what Corbould describes as "instant clouds". (Ironically, though the production's Wales stint was lashed by rain, today is cheerily bright.) The grisly, black rockface above him will, according to production designer Martin Laing's art, be digitally augmented with a fearsome formation resembling a huge, grasping claw.

Perseus is joined by quite a retinue: Arterton's Io, in furs and a long skirt, split to the thigh; Draco and his fellow journeymen, all red-caped bodyguards to Andromeda, with Mikkelsen joined by Liam Cunningham, Hans Matheson and Nicholas Hoult; a pair of Turkish warrior brothers (Ashraf Barhom and Mouloud Achour); a quartet of camels, grunting with incipient displeasure; and a group of indigo-

robed figures sporting scimitars and spears, each of whom have patches of tree-bark sprouting from their faces. These are the Djinn. "Louis sort of saw them as wood-people who gained immortality by remaking their bodies with wood," explains prosthetics supervisor Conor O'Sullivan (who previously worked on Heath Ledger's Joker). Their leader, Sheikh Suleiman (Ian Whyte), scales the Stygian stairway alongside the journeymen. He is seven feet tall and entirely covered in bark, looking like a cross between a Bedouin and an Ent.

Then, behind them all, trundles a truck carrying an elaborate palanquin, mounted on a gimble and decked out with spears, banners and a huge pair of mammoth tusks. Under the VFX supervision of Nick Davis (another *Dark Knight* alum), the truck will be replaced in the finished film by a 40-foot-long mother Scorpiok, subservient to the will of the Djinn and providing Perseus and co. with a spectacularly impressive mount. Not only do they fight giant insects in this movie—they ride on them.

"Bigger, better, more" would certainly seem to be the philosophy behind Leterrier's *Titan*-clash. »

One of these people plays a demi-god — can you guess which?



In ancient times, even dentists' waiting rooms were epic.



CLASH OF THE TITANS

Perseus consults the Stygian witches.



"THE GODS HAVE KILLED PERSEUS'S FAMILY. HE'S OUT FOR REVENGE. HE'S CHARLES BRONSON!"

SAM WORTHINGTON

BOTH LETERRIER AND WORTHINGTON WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ADD THE WORD "DEEPER" TO THE ABOVE. ESPECIALLY IN REFERENCE TO Perseus himself.

"What I wanted to do was just tell a very human story," says the 36-year-old Leterrier, reclining on the couch in his trailer a short while later. "Which is what I also did with *The Hulk* [*in his last movie, The Incredible Hulk*]. Yes, I was really interested in doing the big monster fight at the end of that, but what was really interesting for me was the human side of it. When you have

this in you, how do you deal with it? What would happen if Perseus, who's got a god inside of him but doesn't want it, is pushed to the limit? Sort of Hulks out a bit?"

So does Leterrier really see Perseus as a kind of ancient-world Bruce Banner, cursed with unwanted deific heritage rather than gamma-irradiation?

"Yeah! He hates it. Perseus is a conflicted hero, which is so much better than a 'real' hero, whereas the original Perseus is embracing it and takes the weapons that Zeus gives him."

Worthington agrees wholeheartedly. "He's just your golden hero that you're meant to follow," he

says of Hamlin's Perseus, dismissively. "And that didn't really appeal to me. I feel when my Perseus starts out, he should be this bombastic tank. [*The gods*] have killed his family. He's Charles Bronson! He's gonna go for revenge, and the best way to achieve that is to kill the Kraken. Well, to kill the Kraken, you gotta kill Medusa. To get to Medusa, you gotta take on the witches. Then once he kills the Kraken, he's gonna kill fuckin' Hades and Zeus and everybody else! But along the way he needs to learn to calm down, ask for help. And out of that comes the true hero. A hero isn't someone who leads men — a hero is someone that's in the trench with the men."

STOP PRESS! GODS GET THE NEXT DIMENSION

Clash Of The Titans to be screened in 3-D!

AS EMPIRE WAS GOING TO PRINT, IT was confirmed that *Clash Of The Titans* will be released in both 2-D and 3-D. Surprise!

In the \$US2.25 billion wake of *Avatar*, 3-D has become the latest must-have accessory for any substantial production which has any intention of tearing audiences a new one.

While you may reasonably expect this 3-D-valanche to consume cinemas in one to two years — as new films are made using the latest technology — the impact of James Cameron's sensory revolution is already escalating.

Presumably Warner Bros. was encouraged by 20th Century Fox's Pandoran box-office beast to convert *Clash Of The Titans* to 3-D only months out from its theatrical release.

This 11th hour addition of the extra dimension came at the same time as re-shoots were announced, no doubt commissioned to maximise the eventual 3-D offering.

"We'll be right up against it," *Titans* [*and Avatar, mind*] star Sam Worthington told the *LA Times* late last year about completing all the last-minute changes.

Warner Bros. was unavailable for comment about how *Clash Of The Titans* has scrubbed up in its new suit, but *The Hollywood Reporter*, erm, reports that early test screenings of the 3-D version have inspired the studio to transform other titles. The two-part *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows*, animated *Guardians Of Ga'Hoole* and *Cats And Dogs 2* (believe) will also be getting the 3-D treatment.

If you give it a few minutes, *Iron Man 2*, *Robin Hood*, *Prince Of Persia* and *The A-Team* may well declare 3-D make-over intentions.

THE JOURNEY OF THE *CLASH* REMAKE HAS, YOU COULD SAY, BEEN ALMOST AS FRAUGHT AS THAT UNDERTAKEN BY WORTHINGTON'S PERSEUS.

Firstly, Leterrier had to pick up from Norrington's departure — although the French director only has praise for his predecessor ("He had done great stuff, some amazing conceptual work — it was a smooth transition"). He also had to commit to an astoundingly tight schedule for such a large production: "It's very, very tight," offers De La Noy, who says the film has been "compressed into a shorter-than-normal preparation shoot and post-production period. In fact, the post-production is running impressively concurrent to our production."

Then, during discussions with Liam Neeson regarding the role of chief god Zeus, tragedy struck: Neeson's wife, Natasha Richardson, died after a skiing accident.

"I thought he wouldn't do it," says Leterrier. "But we waited. I said, 'No-one moves, we don't do anything. He will give us the word.'" Leterrier understandably resisted recasting, feeling that Neeson would work best with the actors already on board, especially Ralph Fiennes. "If you take someone else who's great, like Mel Gibson for example, it wouldn't work within this cast — you know, for Mel you would have to change stuff. So we waited, and it turned out that Liam really loved the project, and he really wanted to do it. His kids were the ones who told him to do it in the first place. He really did it for his kids."

Finally, there have been the tough conditions of the shoot itself. Rather than take the *300* route of pure soundstage work and 90 per cent CGI, Leterrier was keen to keep the film location-based, something more along the lines of *The Fellowship Of The Ring*, visually. "When casting," he recalls, "I said, 'I must warn you, this is a big movie, short schedule, visual effects, a ton of practical effects, wind, rain, mud, smoke, all that stuff. It's gonna be miserable!'"

"He treats baboons better, as far as I'm concerned," Worthington jokes of his director. "He hired me because I'm cheap and I'm Australian and I put up with that shit!" It's no shock to learn that Leterrier's shoot has been more physically demanding than toiling in James Cameron's "Volume" for *Avatar*, but Worthington also insists it's been more strenuous than making *Terminator Salvation*. Not that he minds. "You need a movie of this scale, which has this epic quality, to go out on these amazing different terrains. You know you're getting in the mud, you know you're gonna get wet, but that's part of the fun!"

Truth be told, nobody *Empire* meets on set is anywhere near miserable. There's an extremely upbeat atmosphere, characterised by a surfeit of playful banter. After our interview, Worthington tells *Empire* how Mikkelsen's been insisting he has the best "Greek" accent in the cast, and asks us to compliment the Danish actor on this — as well as on the manliness of his legs. (We do: "I'm the only one who's got a real Greek accent," laughs Mikkelsen. "I've been working on it since I was born." And the legs? "I don't have the manliest. I've got good running and jumping legs, but I



The more glamorous portion of the shoot saw the team leave Wales and Surrey behind to film in the Canary Islands.

think you need to go to the wee Australian guy to find the fastest...") Later, we see Mikkelsen, then Worthington, descend a ladder from the truck-mounted Scorpiok palanquin. "Don't look up, boy!" yells Worthington in a faux-redneck brogue, his skirt billowing in the wind.

"We're having tons of fun!" beams Leterrier. "It's two years of my life, a year of their life — let's enjoy it!" This is something that he hopes will translate to the film itself. This *Clash Of The Titans* is definitely grittier than the original, but no-one's saying it's going to be "darker". And it's at this point that the re-makers happily, willingly, take a few steps back towards the original.

"This is not what people originally thought: another *300*," insists Worthington. "This is a romp. We've been trying to make it funnier. Originally, they were saying, 'It's gonna be gritty like *Gladiator*; dirty and brutal.' It is dirty, but only because we're in a mud mine! It's gotta be fun. It's gotta be buoyant."

"It is a family movie," adds Leterrier. "It really is the kind of movie — like the original *Clash* or *Star Wars* — that you and I went to see as kids, that the whole family went to see on Saturday night. It's for everyone."

➤ *Clash Of The Titans* is out on April 1, and will be reviewed next issue.

FROM BUBO TO IO

What's in and what's out of the new *Clash*

IN	OUT
Gemma Arterton as the mysterious Io. "She is kind of a demi-goddess," says Arterton. "She has her own agenda, she's like a cursed, lost soul."	Old, exposition-delivering Ammon, who was played by Burgess Meredith. "He's my character's equivalent, I think," says Arterton. "If you are going to stereotype each character, then that's the one!"
Sheik Suleiman (Ian Whyte), seven-foot-tall leader of the Djinn, a shaman-warrior who has bark for skin. He will, thinks prosthetics supervisor Conor O'Sullivan, be "this movie's Chewbacca".	Bubo, the whirring, clicking, tweeting golden clockwork owl, sent to assist Perseus in place of goddess Hera's real pet bird. Does lots of R2-D2-style comical falling over. May not be entirely absent from <i>Clash</i> 2010...
Shiny armour. The gods of Olympus here wear shimmering, full plate-mail armour, à la John Boorman's <i>Excalibur</i> — "The kind that humans would only be able to imagine themselves wearing," says costume designer Lindy Hemming.	Billowy white robes. "You're a god! Using the power of your mind, you'd just take some metal and crush it and make it into armour," reasons Louis Leterrier. "You don't have a seamstress in the background making a toga for you!"
CGI. Well, what were you expecting? Pegasus, the scorpioks, Medusa (modelled on Russian supermodel Natalia Vodianova), a flock of shrieking harpies and a seriously redesigned Kraken will all be digitally created.	Stop-motion. "I've spoken with Ray Harryhausen," says Leterrier, "but he's not involved." Sam Worthington says he read online that "some dude was pissed that we didn't do stop-motion in this. I'm thinking, Get over yourself, mate!" DAN JOLIN